

## The Modern Ordinary:

### Changing culture of living in Egypt's traditional quarters at the turn of the twentieth Century

#### Abstract

*Having experienced social and political structures of the 19<sup>th</sup> century Europe, Western- educated Egyptian elite used public institutions to force legislative structures and procedures that ruled out traditional housing forms and spatial systems. This essay detects direct and indirect impact of these changes that informed the spatial change of modern living in Egypt in the first quarter of the twentieth century. It offers analysis of socio-spatial practices and change in ordinary Cairenes' modes of everyday living, using social routine and interaction to explain spatial systems and changing house forms during the first quarter of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In doing so, the essay utilized archival documents, accounts, formal decrees, and novels of the time as well as conducting survey of house forms and spatial organizations in Old Cairo.*

#### INTRODUCTION

*'Cairo, therefore, will no longer be an Arab city, and will no longer possess those peculiarities which render it so picturesque and attractive'<sup>1</sup>.*

Sophie Lane-Poole

In the first paragraph of his book, *The story of Cairo*, Stanley Lane-Poole described the city of 1902 by saying: *'There are two Cairos, distinct in character, though but slenderly in site. There is a European Cairo, and there is an Egyptian Cairo. The last was one El-Kahira, the victorious... it is now so little conquering, indeed has become so subdued. ... in truth European Cairo knows little of its medieval sister'*<sup>2</sup>. This grasp of the explicit differences summarizes the city's development throughout the nineteenth century, the period that witnessed the setback for the hawari from being dominant to being marginal urban communities. Muhammad Ali (1805-1849)<sup>3</sup>, intentionally, had banned all traces of medieval architecture and their stylistic peculiarities for different reasons. Banning the use of *Mashrabiyya* in new buildings was made under the *pretext of health and safety*<sup>4</sup>; as it was made of wood, it could cause fire<sup>5</sup>. The truth behind this ban could be understood if we consider the larger plan behind changing the image of the medieval<sup>6</sup>. It was a decisive diversion from the medieval past through, for example, widening the roads,

creating squares and gardens, painting the houses in white, and adopting new housing models. In short, he was putting a modern mask on the old city fabric and soon realized it was not possible.

Following almost five decades and confrontational struggle with the capital's residents and local communities, Ali's plans could be seen as a success. Hence, in contrast to Muhammad Ali's approach, Kediye Ismail (1863-1879) abandoned the hope of improving the *hawari* and focused on producing organized, planned western homes in the suburb of the old city. To achieve this goal, a raft of legislation was produced to control building activities and set standards for building, modifying or maintaining homes. Within this context, the *hawari* were slowly changing from their medieval image into a more complex and modern character. Change was a consequence of a combined set of factors. From one side, social structure of local areas was significantly changing, on the back of emergence of western-styled and civilized centres outside the old city, which attracted rich merchants to relocate, leaving old *hawari* deprived of their rich inhabitants and resources. From the other side, the government started to implement a heavy handed policy to control the built environment and urban space with the aim of enforcing a European-style image (a European nation in the East)<sup>7</sup>. The embryonic form and image of planned Cairo were unmistakable at the turn of the twentieth century, while the *harah's* position as a fundamental urban unit had forever been compromised by the well-established and maintained Ismailia (European) Cairo.

Throughout the nineteenth century, Cairo was moving towards an industrial economy, requiring many peasants to join the newly-established factories and to earn regular wages. Muhammad Ali's (1805-1849) project for modern Cairo commenced with cleaning the *hawari* and painting buildings' facades in white, demolishing ruined houses and regulating street lighting, and façade designs. However, his most important contribution to the changing urban setting was the focus on large size industrial projects such as cotton and oil factories, which required large numbers of regular workers. Those came from the countryside, the troubled and unstable countryside villages, searching for secure jobs in Cairo and looking for cheap accommodation<sup>8</sup>. This situation applied heavy pressure on the *hawari*: an already congested space with poor and low quality services, to accommodate the waves of new migrant workers. On the other hand, late nineteenth century developments made by European real-estate companies attracted the rich merchants due to their European flavour, paved and lit

boulevards<sup>9</sup>. The place of such influential players in local communities of the old city was filled by those poor peasant migrants who came to join the new waged working class. They occupied roofs of houses and vacant plots, creating the *Ishash*<sup>10</sup> and *Ahwash*<sup>11</sup>. This moved the *hawari* down in the social ladder, with their physical structure, the buildings, falling into disrepair due to lack of maintenance and financial resources.

As a result, the *hawari* of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century were no longer the preferred sites for the merchants' homes. Large courtyard houses were, consequently, replaced by compact multi-storey houses. Introverted organization of homes was turned inside-out, with large openings on the central lane. The dominant house type, then, was a three-four level, load-bearing, compact building, which seemed to have followed early model houses of Muhammad Ali that failed to catch on during his lifetime (Fig. 1). The hard boundary and tightening urban area of old Cairo, surrounded by new developments of *Ismaili* Cairo, made inevitable the decline of the historically-dominant model of courtyard houses. The extended family structure, the core of community, had to find alternative ways to reside in smaller plots with lower affordability. Studying old Cairo over that extended period of time has to consider such social and economic change. In fact, until the early decades of the twentieth century, the main headline in the urban scene in Cairo was the transformation towards modernity.

While many studies looked at changes in terms of political culture, social change or architectural style, I look in this essay at the multi-layered and prolonged efforts that demarcated almost five decades of socio-cultural transformation that enabled the change in living condition, lifestyle and cultural values, not simply in the modern quarters, but more so in the *hawari* of the medieval city. I look into how the dream of modernity influenced the idea of home both socially and spatially. *This essay argues that while the liberal values of modernity were embodied in a nationalist agenda that attempted to break with the deeply rooted traditions and mystical culture of the past, the change of the spatial systems of house forms have largely been influenced by the change in the social structure and economic capabilities of those living in the old city. It reports that this change could be traced through three pathways of change in Cairene homes; a. Restructuring the legal system that governed the design and construction of houses; b. Reforming education to focus on domestic manners and behavior; and c. Founding professional training on ideals of modern architecture.*

## THE GENDER QUESTION: WOMEN AS PUBLIC FIGURES

Early forces of change emerged when western-educated Egyptian elites, on returning home from their educational missions in Europe (mainly France) in the second half of Nineteenth Century, were appointed to lead national governmental and cultural institutions<sup>12</sup>. Their objective was to emulate the European model of knowledge and philosophy within the confines of their national territory and with respect to their local culture and tradition as we see in the writings of Gamal El-Din al-Afghani, Muhammad Abdu, Rifa'a Al-Tahtawi and Qasim Amin<sup>13</sup>. While the first three figures were religious scholars with progressive views on Islam, the fourth was of civilian background. They used media outlets and institutions available to them to propagate ideological reform especially through contesting radical culture and restrictions on freedom of thought, practice, and knowledge as well as the discriminative gender segregation of the time. As medieval culture and social conventions were centred on family and the position of women, the *harem*, the reformers considered women as their principal issue for the reform movement. While schools of both sexes (females and males) had been available since the early nineteenth century, the radical Sheikhs insisted that women should stay at home at the service of men, secluded from strangers, with their freedom limited to *harem* enclosures<sup>14</sup>. These currents of reform, especially regarding the position of women, were strong enough to underline the issues publically within periodicals such as *Allataif* during the late 19<sup>th</sup> century.

The *women question* was at the centre of this elitist movement that had extensively questioned the marginal and oppressed position of women in the predominantly patriarch culture of households that excluded them from education, work and public life. It was apparent that the elites' call for the liberation of women and their rights to education moved the women from their peripheral position to be at the centre of modernizing Egypt. These debates had inevitably extended to question the spatial organization of houses and the way the *harem* quarter was isolated. For the elites, this was no longer a suitable spatial order for modern Egypt. The intellectual debate on the position of woman within society had destabilized the traditional form of courtyard house, inviting radical change towards a form of shared tenancy in multi-story apartment buildings. Women's social sphere of activities had significantly changed and the tolerance towards women's exposure in the public scene combined with the shrinkage of domestic areas resulted in more integrated environment between private and public spaces.

Women's position in society was then looked at as an indicator according to which the liberal values of modern societies were measured in a conservative region such as Egypt and the Middle East. Cairo, due to its proximity and links with Europe, was the centre of active development towards modernity throughout the nineteenth and twentieth century. It was the turn of the twentieth century which seemed the period during which Egyptian society started to come to terms with the values of modernity and liberal society. This was explicit in the persistent call for cultural and ideological reform by the intellectual elites in local newspapers since late 1870s that continued for some fifty years defining an era of enlightenment and reform that challenged the inherited medieval thought<sup>15</sup>. Returning elites believed that without changing the mentality of the people, leading the nation to modernity is almost impossible<sup>16</sup>. The desire was to emulate the European model of knowledge and philosophy within the confines of national territory and with respect to their local culture and tradition.

FOR The reformers, in order to attend to be modern, Egyptians had to engage with the knowledge, scientific and philosophical progress of the west<sup>17</sup>, and the indication of this was to accept women as equal members in a liberal society. They correlated the freedom of women to the social freedom and the progress of the nation<sup>18</sup>. The Apex of conflict with the conservatives came after the publishing of Qasem Amin's *Tahrir al-Mar'aa* (Liberation of Woman) in 1899 that was a protest over the radical constraints on women's education and work<sup>19</sup>. The book was introduced by Shaykh Muhammad Abdu (the highest Religious figure, the Egyptian Mufti), what gave it extensive media attention and criticism from conservative and radical leaders<sup>20</sup>.

Interestingly, both the reformers and the radical sheikhs agreed on the centrality of women to the progress of the nation, but each in own terms. The reformers found no contradiction between Islam and western modernity based on women's equal rights, to education, work, and participation in public life. On the other side, the conservatives believed that women should remain isolated at home and focus on their domestic duties. The reformers' thoughts and principles spread throughout the growing number of periodicals and privately-owned printing presses by the second half of the century. Byron D. Cannon argued that social and cultural change was actually taking place in the previous two decades and the book was just articulation of the current stream of thoughts<sup>21</sup>. He referred to articles appeared in *al-Lata'if* magazine during the 1880s, handling the same issues, although in less revolutionary ways. The harem system, the principal feature of medieval culture, however, came to an end, as Berth Badran

claimed, by 1923 when Huda Sharawi, the well-known Egyptian feminist, drew back her veil in public. Later, many had replicated her approach and high class women eschewed the veil as part of their dressing style<sup>22</sup>.

The most notable achievement of the movement rested in the public discourse about women's position in society and the introduction of the *new woman* as an active member in the public domain<sup>23</sup>. Unlike the traditional one, the new woman was educated, active, made good use of time, was not prey to superstition and irrational thinking, while retain her commitments to her family and children<sup>24</sup>. As educated, active and productive, the new women should not be limited to the harem, the isolated quarter in the house. The new woman was the measure to which the society was compared to its European counterpart, as how far it attended to the compulsory requirements of modernity. Furthermore, Egyptian sociologists argued that the reform movement has shaped not only the new woman, but also the new man, who likes a well presented and ordered home, has good taste, and admire pleasant structures<sup>25</sup>. The new man was sensitive, emotional and would only choose his partner through direct interaction and emotional companionship, something that was rejected entirely by the conservative culture. In fact, the new man and woman were pictured as European characters in eastern context.

## **LIVING DOWNTOWN: EUROPEAN MODERNITY OF 19<sup>th</sup> CENTURY**

*"The dwelling's value as a social institution that organized acquaintanceship and Certified public character emerged in contradiction to the perceived limitation and dangers of alternative housing forms. In contrast to the carefully regulated social traffic of home hospitality, boarding and tenant houses appeared social promiscuous, nonselective, and immediately vulnerable to market determinations of personal worth. Tenant housing relations, in contrast, were perceived as imposing no social accountability for moral transgressions."*<sup>26</sup>

In *Housing and Dwelling*, Barbara Miller Lane made the case for the transition of living from locales and communities to the downtown of large cities as a shift of social and spatial significance of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century<sup>27</sup>. Apartment buildings in New York, Paris and London as well as those of Ismaili Cairo and Istanbul allowed families to move out of their productive communities with long inherited socio-cultural systems. The move towards prestigious downtowns with wide boulevards and apartment buildings was inspired by Europeans who had

been living in apartment buildings for generations, and by the second half of the nineteenth century, Parisian apartment buildings were the fashionable model to imitate in big cities (Fig. 2)<sup>28</sup>. The new tenancy system was based on the idea of being independent with lifestyles inscribed by mobility and connectivity in the new quarters. No self-sufficiency, no intimate social coherence within the locality. Marketed at the time in New York as 'Parisian dwellings', Parisian Buildings' or 'French Flats'<sup>29</sup> in New York or nineteenth century Cairo as 'Paris on the Nile', the then European inspiration exemplified how far the French model of living was a subscription for enlightened and elitist social class and an abandonment of the traditional and old pre-industrial community living. The urban change derived by freedom to move easily and frequently both in location and in social status fostered anxieties for families that wanted to assert their social status in the emerging new territories and circumstances<sup>30</sup>.

It was argued that this transition was a by-product of early nineteenth century middle class efforts in planning reform, developing household technologies, and the changing aspiration of working class people<sup>31</sup>. The rise of the bourgeois classes and their delicate living culture and lifestyle owe much to the rise of those European housing models associated with liberal values that flourished during late 1920s and 1930s in Cairo. The highly picturesque and decorated nineteenth century apartment buildings in Cairo, Alexandria or in Albany and Broadway in New York appeared massive in terms of size and height within their local contextual. Their multi-apartment floor plans, occupied by tradesmen, merchants and foreign businessmen, extended to more than the size of four houses of the time. Wide wrought-iron balconies were the most unique element of the new domestic living in the nineteenth century. For the Cairenes, for example, such explicit outward exposure to stranger-onlookers from as deep as the heart of the private home, was totally rejected in the old quarters that relied chiefly on inner, visually protected courtyards. Moreover, to live adjacent to stranger tenants in the same building and sometimes on the same floor meant a shift in the socio-spatial boundaries of privacy from the medieval gates to the very door of the apartment and only a few meters away from the bedroom. In addition, there was no space for the traditional large team of servants in the new apartments. The connection with everyday activities in the street was lost in favour of more mobility and opportunities for engagement with the wider society. This led to an early transition towards modernity and disjuncture with the notion of locality and social coherence. Instead,

modern society with the centrality of the self became the criterion of the new life in the newly shaped urban living.

As tenancy housing proliferated in the new quarters, old quarters witnessed migrant countrymen and lower class residents filling in spaces and buildings abandoned by the departing merchants and professionals. While there was generous provision of services and infrastructure to the new areas, old quarters' quality of living was shattered. Previous courtyard houses were divided into smaller units of one-room or two room apartments for shared and boarding accommodations and the old homogeneous communities were polarised between genuine residents and new settlers. On many occasions, migrant workers had to be housed in old warehouses or former middle class apartment buildings, which were divided into smaller units, not a healthy arrangement as many of the rooms were without proper ventilation. For example, in 1900, Park Avenue and 109th Street in New York City were filled with country migrants, with many of the typical two bedroomed Dumbbell floor plans turned into units of single room accommodation per family. Smaller rooms were dark, without proper ventilation. Shared courtyards were filled with services, creating an unpleasant appearance, all of which contributed to the passing of The American Tenement House Acts of 1867 & 1879 that prohibited cellar apartments unless certain health conditions were met.

## **THE QUESTION OF IDENTITY: BUILDING THE EUROPEAN CAIRO**

Following these campaigns and legislative structures in what was called State Building; Cairo was set to receive the new models of apartment house buildings as part of its fabric, giving way to the emergence of new typology that combined ground floor shops and stores with higher level floors of housing units, mainly in the new quarters. Such Europe-inspired model became more acceptable in the early decades of the twentieth century, when women's movement and accessibility were no longer fundamental issues in house planning or design. Initially started as houses for foreigners, their rich local counterparts soon became resident of these buildings. In fact, this was one approach rich Egyptians followed to upgrade their social lifestyle to prove their ability to stand modern in the urban scene in Egypt. At a time when Egypt was still under the British colonial rule in 1910s-1920s, the discourse on modernity; 'how modern were Egyptians' and 'the reform of Egypt's homes', was central to the process through which middle-



class Cairenes defined themselves as modern and progressive in dissidence against dismissive tone of the colonial rulers<sup>32</sup>.

Lisa Pollard argued that Bourgeoisie male Egyptians of 1919s attached national meanings of solidarity to their domestic habits as part of their national identity; *"Men's marital behavior and domestic habits appeared central to demonstrating Egypt's readiness for self-rule."*<sup>33</sup> In order to become modern, you need to act like one and your attitude to home and family is therefore pivotal. In fact, Pollard listed a host of readings and educational textbooks around 1905-1911 that communicated the new home and its manners of modernity to children through simple words and questions. For example, a reader titled *'Reading and Pronunciation'* asked questions such as, *'What do proper homes need?' and 'How do we build proper houses?'* which were answered that modern lifestyle required, similar to those used by the reform movement, *'order, cleanliness and ventilation.'* For them, *'dark or crowded quarters were listed as belonging to another world, a premodern world which had to be done away with such that a new era of modernity could be ushered in'*<sup>34</sup>. This could justify particular architectural transformation and predominance of certain forms of the time. In that sense, parallel to the decline of mashrabiyyah as old fashion, open terraces overlooking large streets boulevards represented the symptom of modern living in Cairo and other cities such as Alexandria. (Fig. 3)

The process of structured education on modernity and modern living, indeed reached to the professional training of emerging engineering schools that soon became apparent in the work of their graduates. By 1930s, design drawings for houses largely followed this trend. The liberation of women from the harem wings, facilities by national modernists, eased the burden of large houses and forced a rational space organisation. In fact, house designs of two prominent Egyptian architects during 1930s showed how dominant modern open-building forms were. Hassan Fathy early work and Ramses Wissa Wassef designs of homes of the time are testimony on that. In (Fig. 4) Hassan Fathy, known for his admiration of traditional building techniques at later stages, displays a fairly outward-oriented floor plan of apartment-office buildings with large balcony and opening directly open to the rooms' interiors. Access to the house unit and from is largely exposed to public view. Even though designed outside the old city, it denotes a departure from the mentality of enclosures and manipulation of space advocated by the traditional forms of the hawari. If Fathy's designs were outside the historical core, Ramses Wissa Wassef Diploma Project of 1930s was in the Old city. Wassef's work showed a degree of

uncertainty and tension between the value of the contextual fabric and the ideals of modernity of the time with the use of concrete and square spaces arranged around a courtyard, however, an open one (Fig. 5).

However, with the colonial rule coming to an end, the socialist agenda took over with more focus on social equity and the ideals of mass production of housing leading the notion of home to be industrious and economic in principle. This resembled a fundamental departure from social domain of interaction to be driven by authoritative state policies management of public properties, with serious violation of local social cohesion and breakdown of the socio-spatial association, witnessed in the old city. During Nasser's projects of social housing, the spatial organisation of home denied any opportunity of privacy and local control on the built environment. Moving from state-led social housing projects to private developers of late 1970s, the modernist typologies of isolated and disconnected apartment buildings dominated the urban scene in Cairo. During that period, the idea of home as social construct represented, to a large extent, a withdrawal of socially cohesive communities and the making of home as way of building society. While the position of women was largely central to the idea of home in Old Cairo, new houses of modernity exposed the vulnerability of the family and their processes of communal and contextual existence, at least in new neighbourhoods that were bombarded with masses of concrete giants that are economic models of consumption.

#### **THE LEGISLATION QUESTION: CHANGING PROFESSION AND CULTURE OF LIVING**

The new perspectives and tolerance towards the movement and interaction of women within the society resulted in simpler and less complex house layout. Extensive measures of isolating the harem were no longer compulsory. The model of independent, self-sufficient courtyard house was no longer a successful or affordable model to follow. This was evident in the increasingly relaxed and simplified organization of the houses built between 1880s and 1920s and the incremental number of extrovert apartment building construction, either in the old city or the new quarters equally. Few large houses in the hawari of old Cairo, retained the traditional courtyard houses but with much easier access to rooms around it, including the harem. Transparency became acceptable in the house and corridors have been lit and direct towards

the rooms, while windows started to have glass panes, as we see in Bayt Al-Kharazi (1881AD). In short, the idea of home was changing in the mentality of local people.

On the other hand, the reference to the delicate taste and sensitivity of the new characters required for modern Egypt would essentially require a changed home. Hence, the debate between the old and the new and subsequent confrontations among both of them continued during the first half of the twentieth century and naturally extended to the territory of home that required, according to the reformers, an equal change in its structure. It was necessary to make a convincing economic reasoning that made sense to the increasingly poor Egyptians as well as among educated Egyptians. Qassim Amin criticized the complexity of gender-segregated houses in Cairo in *The Liberation of Woman*: 'Look at us, you find our house is divided into two parts, one for men and another for women. When we need to build a house, in effect, we spend what is enough for two houses [two attached houses]..... This includes furniture for each of the two houses, two teams of servants, one for men and another for women.'<sup>35</sup> In addition, he applauded the Western middle class house that is 'well organized, more beautiful than its oriental counterpart, even though the European spends much less than the Arab'<sup>36</sup>.

This attack on the traditional forms of houses was coordinated among other reformers. Almost a decade earlier, Ali Pasha Mubarak, the minister of Public Work, and in justification to the initiation of municipal system that limited design and construction of houses to trained professional, launched a comprehensive criticism for traditional form of living ruling it as inefficient and unhealthy. In his infamous and bold statement, Mubarak stated:

*'Today people have abandoned old ways of construction in favour of the European style because of its more pleasant appearance, better standards and lower costs. In the new system, rooms are either square or rectangular in shape. In the old system, living rooms together with their dependencies were disordered corridors and courtyards occupying a lot of space...most of the spaces lacked fresh air and sunlight, which are the essential criteria for health. Thus humidity accumulated in these spaces causing disease... facades never followed any geometric order thus looking like those of cemeteries. In the new system facades are ordered and have good familiar look'.<sup>37</sup>*

Ali Mubarak, *Al-Khitat al-Tawfiqiyyah*, 1888.

Mubarak's criticism, in fact, was designed to make case for western forms of living that follows simpler order and geometric principles. But, to accept new forms, you must dismiss the long rooted and accepted models as problematic and wasteful, while being unhealthy. In fact, one sentence in particular was striking; he dismissed the '*disordered corridors and courtyards occupying a lot of space*', which he knew as peculiar to local tradition and part of the local social systems in Old Cairo, centred around the movement of women and ensuring adequate level of privacy. Indeed, as official and reformer, he was promoting western lifestyle through the Parisian-typology of the time with its compact forms of apartment buildings that rely on the independence of the living unit, disconnection from wide street boulevards and geometrically ordered array of windows that expose the interior of the house to the outside world.

On the other hand, active public life in the local alleys did not survive these institutional reforms. The hawari's social life was challenged by a series of laws aiming to change the physical features and organization of those spaces. Between 1880 and 1910, various laws were issued to put the public sphere into a shape and order that suited the ruling regime's desired image. The clearest attempt appeared in the decree issued by the Ministry of Public Works on 22<sup>nd</sup> February 1882, whereby Article 12 was intended to clear the roads of the stone seats spread across the old city (Fig. 6). It says: "*All structures intruding from the building into the road, such as stone seats, stairs, should be removed with the exception of historic, religious or artistically valued buildings until their facades are refurbished on the alignment line*"<sup>38</sup>. Article 13 of the same decree instructed that "*all existing arches on public roads should be demolished once they are damaged or attached structures are to be restored [refurbished]*." It continued: "*The construction of those arches on public roads is prohibited from now on*"<sup>39</sup>.

While the stone seats were removed and re-built several times, it is presumed that legislations relating to permission and fees for public festivities were not implemented, at least in Old Cairo<sup>40</sup>. It was apparent that the government wanted to deal with old Cairo and its hawari as it did with Ismaili Cairo with its paved and wide boulevards. The regulators and officials did not understand that the public sphere of the *hawari*, including its physical features (stone seats, stairs) and social events (festivities and *mawlid*s), were essential parts of local culture and daily life. They housed essential economic activities, serving food to visitors for

*mawlids* that flourished throughout the year [R4.2.08]. Removing the seats and getting permission for using public spaces could have eliminated most gatherings and basic socio-cultural patterns of life.

Furthermore, to later a deeply rooted profession and traditional building practices, a firm control of the administrative or legislative structures was needed. Following several attempts by Kedive Tawfiq (1879-1892) and Habbas Helmi (1892-1914) to organize activities such as building, trading, crime, and taxation, a tax council was formed in 1886, comprising elected local building owners, to control building activities. The ultimate transformation towards a modern state, thought, entailed the reform of its governmental and municipal structure. Tanzim department was developed the leading institution attempting to handle the confusing structure and urban order<sup>41</sup>. The legislations might appear to have been necessary for organization of the growing metropolitan Cairo. However, the influence of the Europeans, especially the French engineers, was apparent. During the last quarter of the nineteenth century, French-educated Egyptians controlled most governmental and cultural institutions, in participation with western (mainly French) experts. Tanzim Department in 1889, for example, employed 4 Egyptians and 6 French engineers and all formal correspondence and communications were written in French<sup>42</sup>. Under this organization, the traditional master builder's role was subdivided among several institutions: the architect, for design and production of accepted scaled drawings; the Ministry of Public Works, for design reviews, permissions and inspection; and finally, the new builder who had to construct the building exactly as per the drawings and specifications<sup>43</sup>.

From 1883 onwards, new building activities and restorations were not allowed without prior permission from the *Tanzim* department, based on approved drawings made by 'architect/engineer'. A decree issued on 8<sup>th</sup> September 1883 from the Ministry of Public Works<sup>44</sup> (Fig. 7) said: "*Clause 1: Any building activities within cities should obtain a formal permission before the work commences*". Clause 2 of the same decree insisted that the application for building permission should be accompanied by "*drawings of the plot, roads and neighbours drawn on a scale 1:200*". The new legislation required every new building to follow the defined road alignment maps (*Khutut Tanzim*)<sup>45</sup>. The same decree set the minimum dimensions of a room to be 4(L)x3(W)x3(h) meters. Any non-approved activities were considered illegal and were subject to a penalty or demolition<sup>46</sup>. The extent of these restrictions was described by Mahboub during the 1930s: '*They [power of rules] are wide to the extent that by the application of Tanzim*

*Alignment laws of 1881, 1887 and 1889, building lines can be decreed for the widening or modifying of any public street or road. No new constructions can encroach on these lines, and, moreover, heightening or any forms of maintenance, including even plastering of such portions of existing buildings as are cut by these lines, are forbidden.'*<sup>47</sup>

The master builder, the central character in building activities in the Cairo of 1800, was the main victim of the new building regulations and decrees, and was replaced by a complex technical process of planning, drawings, application and construction by the end of the century. The new system required qualified professionals to implement the state's vision, and only architects with experience in producing scaled drawings for formal review and permission purposes. Furthermore, the construction work had to be supervised by the architect/engineer and Tanzim officers as per a legislative decree issued on 8<sup>th</sup> September 1883<sup>48</sup>. The decree defined several conditions and recommended certain forms and spatial orders and set several hygienic regimes and spatial requirements such as minimum internal room configuration, natural ventilation for all rooms, and orienting openings to the north, with provision for a few to the south (for cross ventilation) (Fig. 8). Moreover, it required a toilet for every closed apartment and recommended construction materials and finishes, external and internal as well as inspection procedures: walls should be made of *'limestone or bricks with lime mortar'*<sup>49</sup>. *'Internal walls should be plastered and receive one coat of oil paint'*. All work should be inspected frequently by the Ministry of Public Works' engineers<sup>50</sup>.

## **SOCIAL ECONOMY and THE UNAFFORDABLE TRADITION**

Homes of Old Cairo had no option but to replace the introverted, large plot size houses with extroverted high rise (3-4 storeys) compact houses, in which the horizontally-stretched Harem turned into vertically organized wings. Transformation of socio-cultural and economic conditions definitely took its toll on the built fabric in every aspect. With the departure of rich merchants, most of building trade was on small plots and part-shares due to inheritance; some shares had been sold separately or swapped with others. The vast majority of selling records in *al-Bab al-Ali's* court around the turn of the century followed the same convention<sup>51</sup>. The result was small plots for reduced, compact, vertically-extended houses that soon developed into joint-household units, in which family relatives used to occupy separate apartments within the same

building. Kenneth Cuno reported that the joint-household system predominated urban housing in Egypt at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century<sup>52</sup>. In his study, Cuno found that the majority of houses in Cairo consisted of joint-household units of 7 members (58%) rather than the single houses of the second half of the nineteenth century<sup>53</sup>. At the turn of the twentieth century, only a few houses of courtyard introverted organization were still in actual use.

Emerging domestic typology had to accommodate families within parts of previous houses, with new socio-spatial logic that was organized vertically. The basic unit of the family, the master of the family, would occupy the first two levels: the ground level had an entrance, main *hawsh*, for stable and food storage, a *Majlis* male and family reception space, a kitchen with oven and a few services [R3.1.07]<sup>54</sup>. If more space were available, the harem wing could be part of this level. Upper levels were arranged to include a variety of sleeping (harem) wings with small service areas, each of which housed a sub-family branch, mainly elder sons and their families (Fig. 9). A second stage of this development came when each family residence was divided into separate apartments whose occupants were not related to each other. This was taking place, chiefly during the 1940s-1960s, parallel to the modern movement in Europe and the rise of apartment buildings in cosmopolitan Cairo and promoted by the state<sup>55</sup>. The vacant multi-story houses were then filled with immediate occupants from different backgrounds. For the first time, every unit of the building had to work independently and include all services. The shared kitchen on the ground floor started to disappear and small kitchen units were implanted at every level. While surveying some of these houses in alGammaliyyah, tight kitchens and bathrooms were found to be common features.

This transformation had profound implications for the social cohesion and physical infrastructure of these buildings. Vertical extensions meant reducing areas of direct communication between houses from one side and the public sphere from the other, both visually and vocally, in a break from the local tradition that relied on the continuous flow of activities between private and public spheres and where zones of transition occupied and transcended the boundaries between indoor and outdoor spaces. Under the new order, there was a need for alternative means of communication between high levels and the alley space. Operable windows, based on the modern *Rumi* style<sup>56</sup>, and terraces emerged to dominate facades, being specially recommended by new building regulations. Balconies became the transitional spaces providing outward overlapping spaces with the alley for those living in high

level apartments to stay in contact with events taking place on the ground. Similarly, pushing apartments towards higher levels facilitated the increase in the number of retail shops and workshops intruding into ground floor areas opening to the *harah* space.

## **CONCLUSIONS: PARTING HISTORY OR INTRODUCING MODERNITY??**

In this paper I examined the currents of modernity throughout the last quarter of Nineteenth Century and Early Twentieth Century through multi-layered analysis. I argued that currents of reforms that involve the gender question, Issues of identity, social economy and spatial transformation were in presence in everyday life of the Cairenes in the *Hawari* of the Old City as they were active in the Modern Quarters in Ismaili Cairo. While the internal migration towards the new European-style quarters was an explicit act of change in lifestyle and engagement with modern life at the time, the analysis of the architecture of home in the Old City and the newly introduced legislations showed profound transformation in the buildings and the fabric of the old city which are another path of modernity that is genuine and authentic in response to local living conditions and social need. It is found striking that the decline of fortunes and services in the old *hawari*, did not result in breakdown in its operation. Rather, the centuries-old communities proved resilient and flexible to absorb the profound change and reconfigure its spatial structure to manage new conditions of modern life, with industrial economy at its centre.

Furthermore, the departure of the rich merchants and elite from old Cairo, while contributing to the physical and financial deterioration, did not result in a similar decline of shared social activities. Coffee houses during the 1920s, according to Naguib Mahfouz<sup>57</sup>, were the sites for meetings, funding and arranging revolts and attacks against the British soldiers. They were also local public venues full of people and entertainers every night until the morning. In *Palace Walk*<sup>58</sup>, Mahfouz described such a continuously active environment: *'There was no clue by which to judge the time. The street noise outside her room would continue until dawn. She [a wife awaiting her husband's return] could hear the babble of voices from the coffee houses and bars, whether it was early evening, midnight, or just before daybreak.'*<sup>59</sup> Such a lively picture was affirmed by both Stanley Lane-Poole at the turn of the century and by Ahmed Mahfouz<sup>60</sup> in *'Mystery of Cairo'*, a rare book about Cairene life at the turn of the century.

The turn of the twentieth century was found to be the most challenging period for the survival of the *hawari* of Cairo, with lack of support, intensive migrations and destruction to its



infrastructure and physical systems. Old Cairo was a battle ground for the emerging intellectual reform movement and its position on women's participation in society and the public sphere, and where radical culture was deeply rooted and most powerful. However, change in the popular mood towards women was facilitated and encouraged by the emergence of the modern quarters of European Cairo, rulers' pressure to drive the wealthy merchants to reside in newly developed zones, while formal institutions took forceful action to reform the built environment. Medieval houses and harawi were the first to be affected by this process of change, fundamentally and structurally. Courtyard-centred houses became an unnecessary luxury for the emerging low class community. This form of organization was replaced by the more affordable, compact and extroverted multi-story family houses on smaller plots of land.

Large houses were divided into smaller plots due to inheritances and exchange laws, and later every portion was developed as an independent unit/building. The notion of having a house to exclusively accommodate one extended family was in decline and giving way to more divided and independent apartments. In the meantime, the state's formal institutions exercised powerful control over activities in the public sphere, manifested in the opening of the western dead end to through traffic, declaring two houses as historical sites and requesting formal permits prior to any public festivities and celebrations in public spaces. The sovereignty of the local social group was, hence, compromised and their control over the public sphere was challenged by emerging institutions.

While European influence on the architecture of home in Cairo was largely perceived in its direct forms of apartment buildings in the new Ismaili quarters of Late 19th Century Cairo, its deep effect that later changed the urban structure, culture and fabric of the metropolis remained implicit in the Old City. Such gap in research, in my view, requires further efforts and exploration on the way currents of modernity met and negotiated long rooted traditions and radical thoughts.

## FIGURES

Fig. 1: Model Modern Houses of Muhammad Ali's era

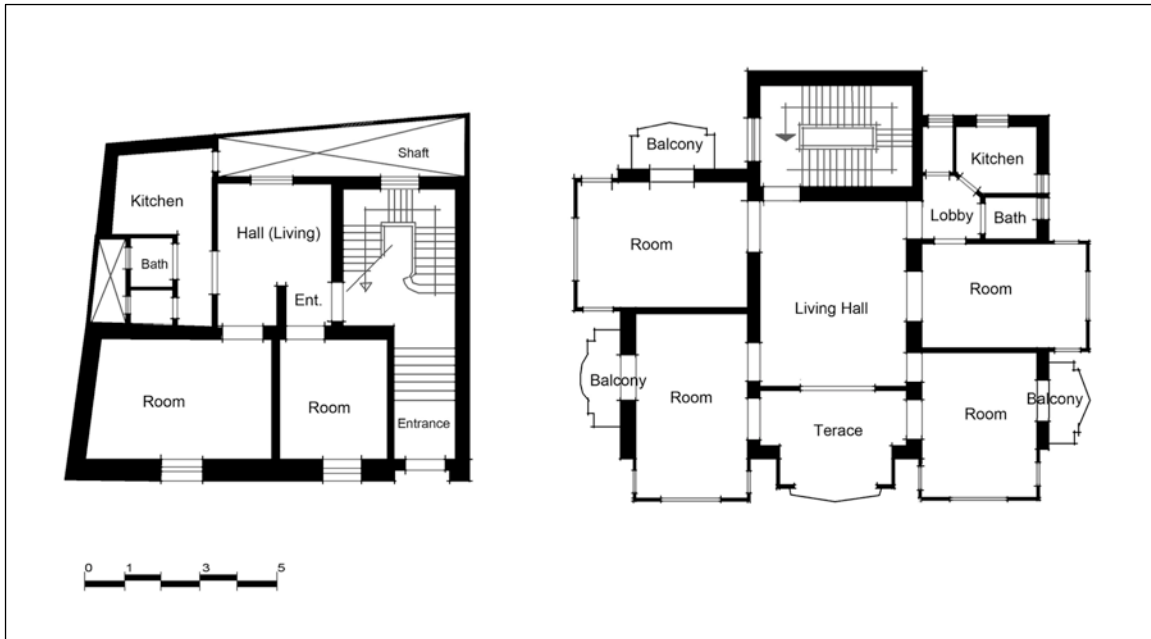


Fig. 2: Early classical Period Apartment Building

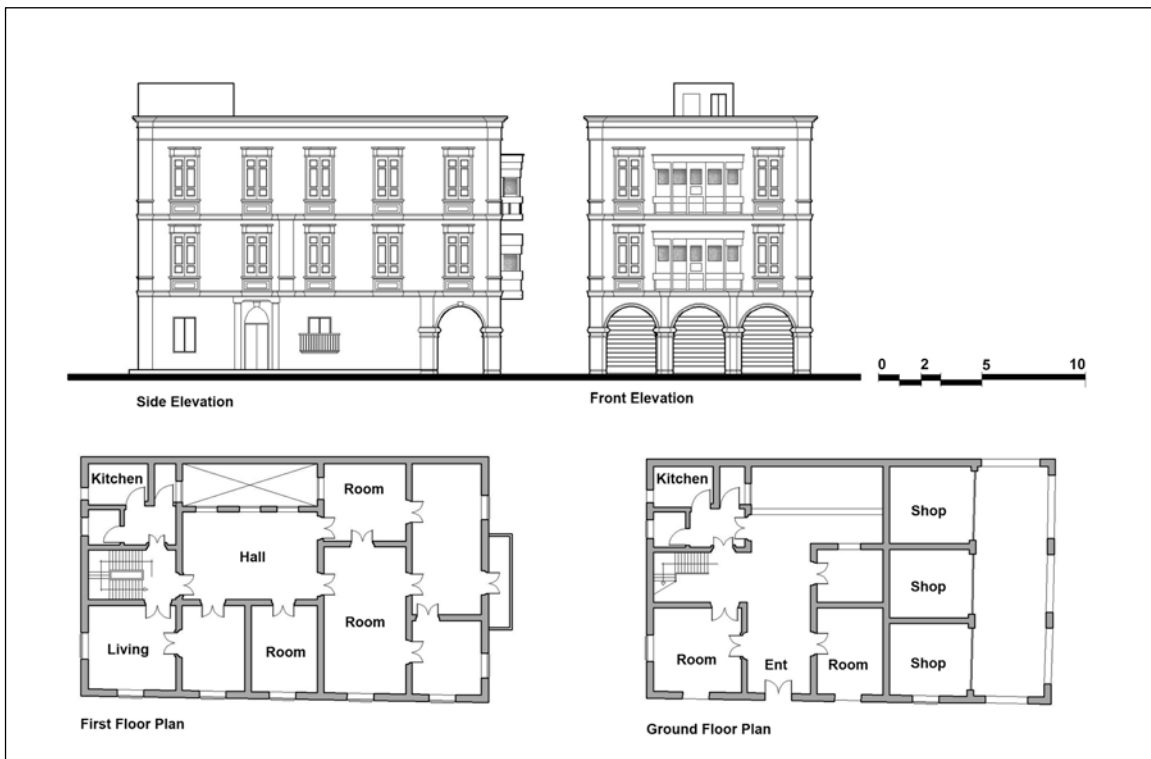


Fig. 3: Cherif Pacha Street in Alexandria a Boulevard of early twentieth Century  
(Courtesy to RBSCCL- The American University in Cairo)

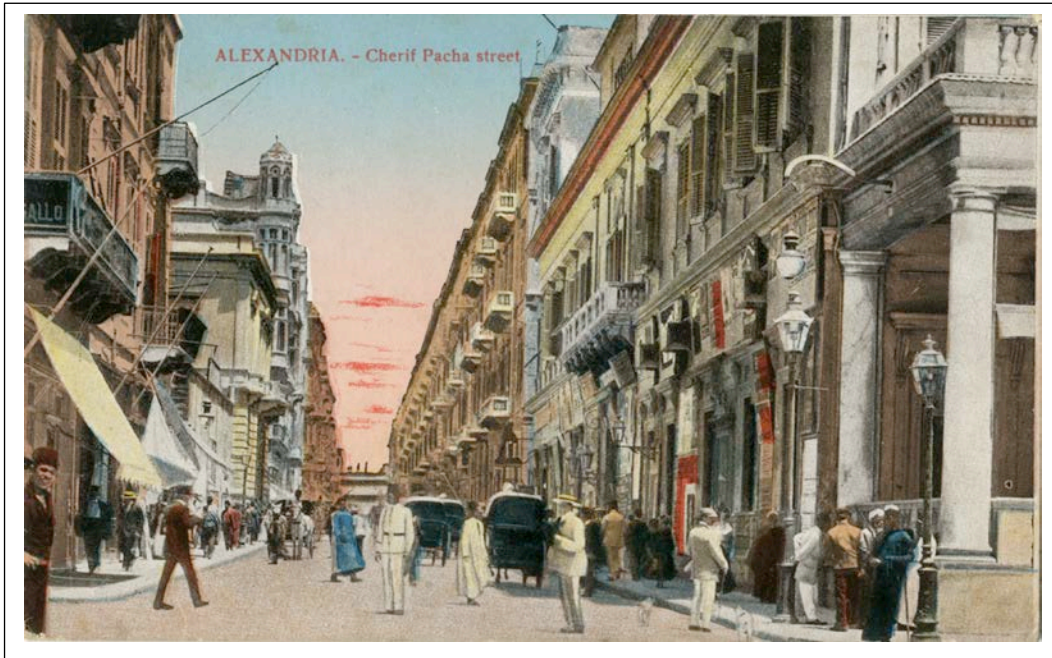


Fig. 4: Early plans of modern Office Building in Cairo by Hassan Fathy  
(Courtesy to RBSCCL- The American University in Cairo)

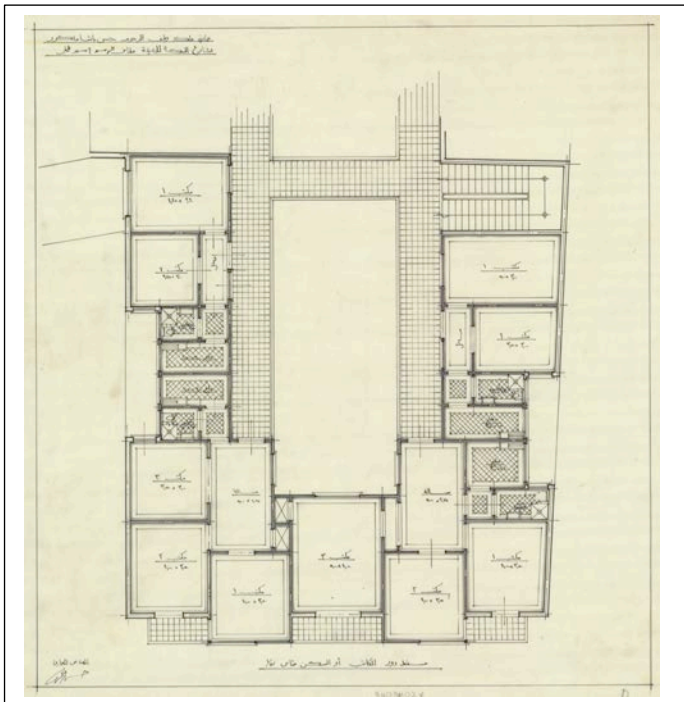


Fig. 5 Wissa Wasif Diploma Project in Cairo: Early designs of open courtyard houses (1930s)  
(Courtesy to RBSCL- The American University in Cairo)

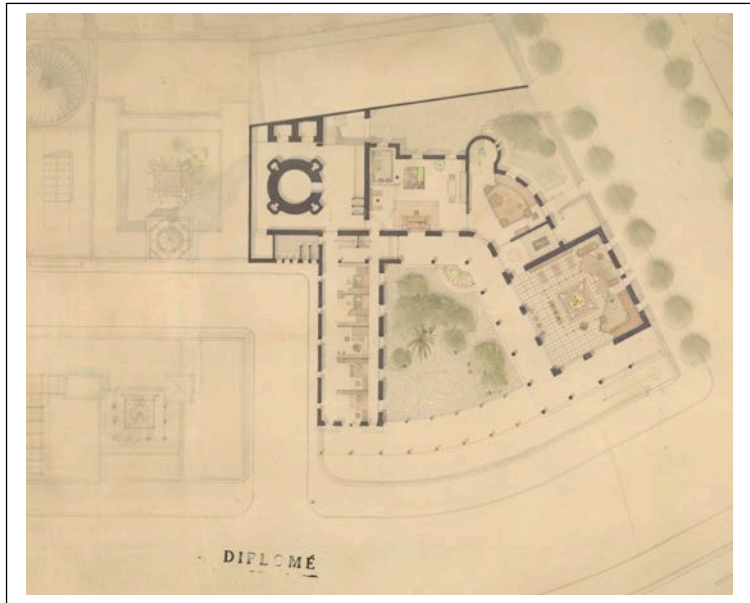


Fig. 6 Stone Seats in the alleyways of the old City (Lane-Poole, the Story of Cairo, 1902)

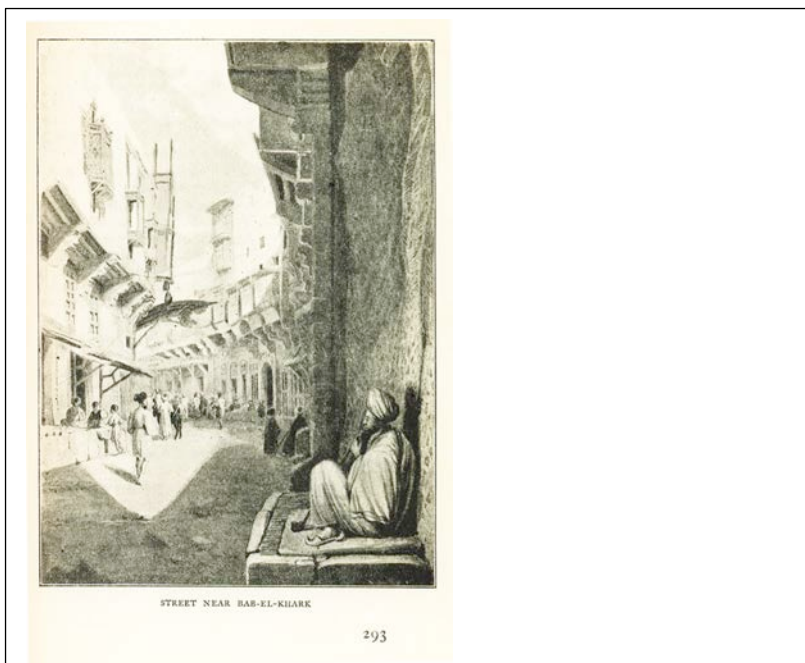


Fig. 7 Original decree for first building regulation in 1880s

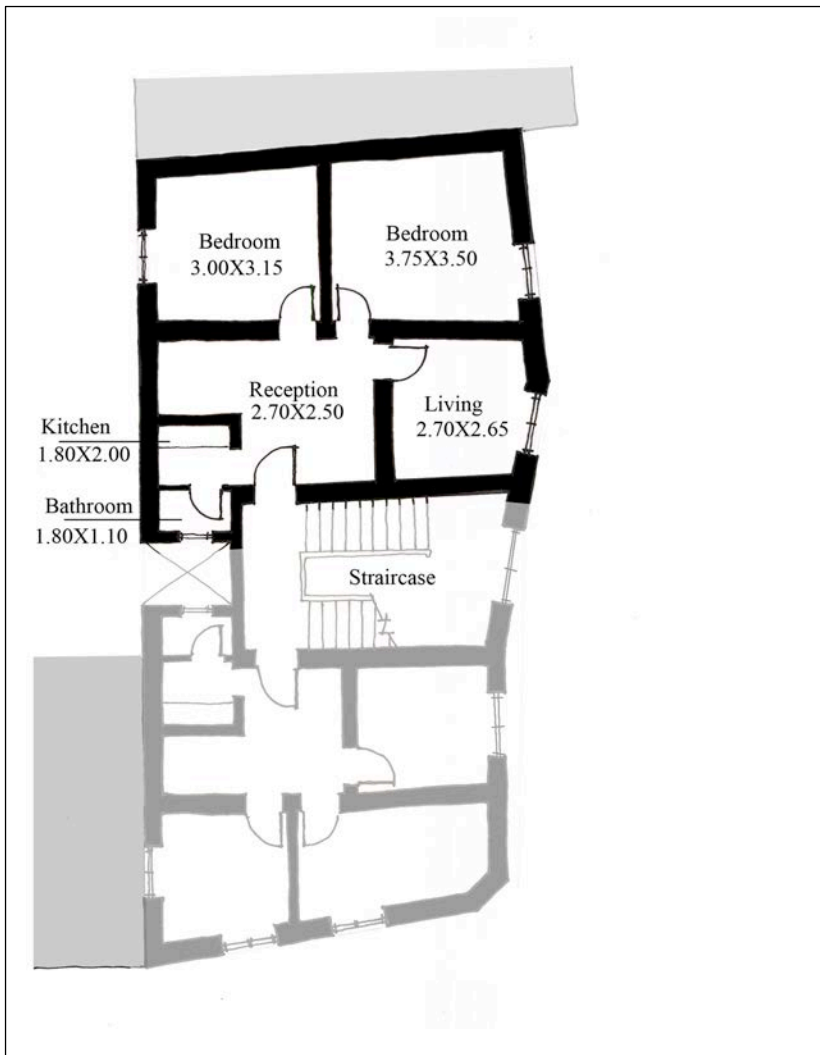


Fig. 8: More ordered internal Façades of 1880s houses in the Old city: Bayt AlKharazi (1881)





Fig. 9: Common Typology of house buildings for smaller family units in early Twentieth Century:  
Zuqaq Al-Darb Al-Asfar.



## NOTES AND REFERENCES

<sup>1</sup> Sophia Lane-Poole describing her criticism of Muhammad Ali's policies and plans to modernize Egypt and abandon the old city during her stay in Cairo. See: S. Lane-Poole, *The Englishwoman in Egypt: Letters from Cairo*. 2 volumes. (London: William Clowes & Sons., 1845)

<sup>2</sup> S. Lane-Pool, *The Story of Cairo*. (London: J.M. Dent & Co. 1902). p1

<sup>3</sup> Muhammad Ali was the ruler of Egypt from 1805-1847, and is considered the founder of modern Egypt, where he built a modern army and navy. He dreamed of Egypt as a powerful and advanced state and established the first industrial economy in Egypt.

<sup>4</sup> Lane-Poole, *The English Woman in Egypt*. p49. In her letter of July 1843, she stated, 'a proclamation has been issued by the Pasha for extensive alteration and repairs throughout the city. The houses are to be

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white washed within and without; those who inhabit ruined houses are to repair or sell them; and uninhabited dwellings are to be pulled down for the purpose of forming squares and gardens; mashrabiyyat are forbidden, and mastabahs are to be removed.' This was quoted, as well, in: J. Abu-Lughud, *Cairo: 1001 years of city victorious*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971) p93-94

<sup>5</sup> B. Kenzari, & Y. ElSheshtawy, *The Ambiguous Veil: On Transparency, the Mashrabiyya, and Architecture*. *Journal of Architectural Education*. Vol 56, no 4, Pp.17-25. (2003) p22

<sup>6</sup> Abu Lughud, *Cairo*.

<sup>7</sup> The force was apparent in several decrees issued during the 1880s to apply constraints on new buildings in the form of specific standards such as room sizes, materials and external and interior finishes. These all were driven from Ali Mubarak's vision (as quoted at the beginning of the chapter). See for example, decree issued on 1<sup>st</sup> September 1882, imposing the first building regulations (shown in page 178)

<sup>8</sup> Beinín, J. & Zachary, L. *Workers on the Nile: nationalism, communism, Islam, and the Egyptian working class, 1882-1954*. (Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, 1998). p24; J. Beinín, *Formation of The Egyptian Working Class*. MERIP Reports, no.94: *Origins of the Working Class, Class in the Middle East*. Washington: Middle East Research and Information Centre, Pp14-23, (1981) p15

<sup>9</sup> Jean-Luc Arnaud argued that moving those merchants to new quarters was a principal plan of the government. Merchants living at the edge of the old city, in particular, were given large plots in new quarters to build new homes, while 'keeping their businesses (shops, stores) in the old city, which should remain the central site for trade in Cairo in the long term'. This was planned to feed the new Ismailia quarter with active movement and lively environment. See Jean-Luc Arnaud *Le Caire: Mise en Place d'une ville modern 1867-1097, Des intérêts du prince aux sociétés privées*. Arabic translation by Halim Toussein & Fuad El-Dahan (2002) Cairo: Higher Commission for Culture in association with French Centre for Culture and Cooperation in Cairo. (1998) p153

<sup>10</sup> Ishshash (pl., single: ishshah) and means a temporary structure, mainly of timber.

<sup>11</sup> Ahwash (pl., single hawsh) means gated open land filled with tents. However, this phenomenon was not present at all hawari. Some of them did not experience such migrant waves (at least not extensively) as Al-Darb al-Ahmar.

<sup>12</sup> Such as Ministry of Education, Ministry of Public Work and others.

<sup>13</sup> Those names were listed by Albert Hourani, in his seminal work, *Arab thoughts in the liberal age as leading reformers in Egypt, during the period 1850-1940*. See A. A. Hourani *Arabic thought in the liberal age, 1798-1939*. (London: Oxford University Press, 1962)

<sup>14</sup> H. Shaarawi, *Harem years: The Memoirs of an Egyptian feminist*. Translated and Introduced by Margot Badran. (New York: Feminist Press at the City University of New York, 1986). p11

<sup>15</sup> Hourani, *Arab Thought in the Liberal Age*, *ibid*.

<sup>16</sup> Refer to Qassim Amin's *Liberation of women*; Ahmed Lutfi Al-Sayyid *Articles in AL-Jarida*.

<sup>17</sup> Hourani, *ibid*. 103

<sup>18</sup> This was identical to the view of Gamal El-Din El-Afghani's articles in *Al-lata'if* magazine during 1880s.

<sup>19</sup> Amin, *Tahrir al-Mar'aa* (The liberalization of women), Arabic Title. In Emara, M. (2008) *Qasim Amin: Complete works*. Cairo: Dar al-Shorouq. Pp319-417. p322

<sup>20</sup> Muhammad Emara justified his argument, that Amin had little knowledge about strong religious references used in his book. He referred to several statements by their contemporaries that Abdu supported the book and was assumed to have written large parts of it while he was the Mufti, the highest scholarly post in Egypt. See Emara, *Qasim Amin*. p117-127

<sup>21</sup> B. D. Cannon *Nineteenth-Century Arabic Writings on Women and Society: The Interim Role of the Masonic Press in Cairo- (al-Lataif, 1885-1895)*. *International Journal of Middle East Studies*. Vol. 17, No.4. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985).pp463-484, p469- 470; Women were already admitted to

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certain fields of education. For example, In 28<sup>th</sup> September 1886, 13 female students graduated with diplomas from the School of Birth as was announced in the formal newspaper of the time: *al-Waqa'l al-Masriyyah* Issue 28<sup>th</sup> September 1886. p924

<sup>22</sup> Shaarawi, *Ibid.* p7

<sup>23</sup> Amin, *Al-Mar'a al-jadida*, 1900. See Mohammad Imara, *Qasim Amin: Complete Works*.

<sup>24</sup> H. ElSadda, *Gender, Nation and the Arabic Novel: Egypt 1892- 2008*. (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press. 2012)

<sup>25</sup> H. El Sadda *Imaging the "New Man": Gender and Nation in Arab Literary Narratives in the Early Twentieth Century*, *Journal of Middle East Women's Studies*, Vol.3, No.2, pp31-55, (2007) p32.

<sup>26</sup> E. Blackmar, *Manhattan for rent 1785-1850*. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989)

<sup>27</sup> B. M. Lane, (ed.) *Housing and Dwelling: Perspectives on Modern domestic architecture*. (London: Routledge, 2007)

<sup>28</sup> E. C. Cromley, *Alone together: A history of New York's early apartments*. (New York: Cornell University Press, 1990)

<sup>29</sup> Cromley, *ibid.* , as quoted in Lane, B. M. (ed.), 2007, 'Housing and Dwelling', p 106.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, p 107.

<sup>31</sup> Blackmar, 'The social meanings of housing', p108. Blackmar, E. (1989) "The social meanings of housing, 1800-1840", in B. M. Lane, (ed.), 2007, 'Housing and Dwelling', p108

<sup>32</sup> L. Pollard, *The Family Politics of Colonizing and Liberating Egypt, 1882-1919*, *Social Politics*, 7(1), (2007) pp.47-79

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, p58

<sup>35</sup> Amin, *The Liberation of Woman*. Translation is made by the Author.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>37</sup> Ali Mubarak (1823-18953) was the first minister of Public Works in Egypt, and was one of the most influential Egyptian reformers in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. He was educated in France (1844-850) and led the Egyptian Ruler, Khedive Ismail's project to build European Cairo. This statement was written in his book, *al-Khitat al-Tawfiqiyyah*. The translation is taken from Khaled Asfour, *Identity in the Arab Region: Architects and Projects from Egypt, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and Qatar*. p151

<sup>38</sup> A Decree issued by the Cabinet concerning the conditions and the structure of the Tanzim Department and its responsibilities, 22<sup>nd</sup> February 1882. Ministry of Public Works. Archival Document, file number 6/2/A Public Works (Archival Code: 0075-035967.) Cairo: The National Centre for Archival Documents.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>40</sup> As described by elderly members (R1 & R4), during the 1930s and 1940s, people were arranging festivities and parties in the public spaces freely and without intervention of the authorities. The brief records of Stanley Lane-Poole about the life in the hawari of old city confirm this proposition that social activities like weddings, festivities and funerals were actively taking place on a daily basis. My believe is that such legislation was strictly applied on main roads and thoroughfares and not on the hawari, which were rarely visited by the officials.

<sup>41</sup> See several decrees for new alignments of Cairene hawari issued during 1889-1910, in which some plots were either added or excluded from the public road network. For example: Decrees dated 28<sup>th</sup> November 1910 (File 6/3/D, Public Works, Code: 0075-036184); 9<sup>th</sup> November 1908 (File 6/3/D, Public Works, Code: 0075-036183). Cairo: The National Centre for Archival Documents.

<sup>42</sup> The Cabinet had requested translation of those correspondences to discuss them. Some letters on this request were found among the archival records of the Ministry of Public Works during the 1880s.



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<sup>43</sup> In the daily records of the Ministry of Public Works, several projects were announced for bidding on construction works. For such bidding, detailed specifications and drawings were specified by the owner or the institution which owned the building. See for example: record 5/2/1M (Architectural issued documents), no.355-Buildings, for the year 1877.

<sup>44</sup> Formal Decree for the condition of building houses within big cities, 8<sup>th</sup> September 1883. Ministry of Public Works. Archival Document, file number 6/2/A Public Works (Archival Code: 0075-035972.) Cairo: The National Centre for Archival Documents.

<sup>45</sup> Due to the lack of professionals at this period and their high cost, I expect that many building owners left their buildings un-restored and limited the opportunities for low class people to build new houses. Ruined buildings were continuously occupied without maintenance. In the popular *al-Moqattam* newspaper, a French Architect called Korsicous published daily advertisements for building houses and receiving his fees in delayed installments. See *Al-Moqattam Newspaper*, issues 3279, 80, 81 dated 8<sup>th</sup>, 11<sup>th</sup>, 15<sup>th</sup> January 1900. Cairo: Sarrouf and co.

<sup>46</sup> All these decisions were taken by the Tanzim department and Ministry of Public Works under the Alignment Act of 1881, and the Law of Expropriation of 1906 Mahboub, *ibid.* p289

<sup>47</sup> Mahboub *ibid.* p292

<sup>48</sup> Formal Decree for the conditions on building houses within big cities, 8<sup>th</sup> September 1883, Ministry of Public Works. Archival Document, file number 6/2/A Public Works (Archival Code: 0075-035972.) Cairo: The National Centre for Archival Documents.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>51</sup> They were similar even in terms of gender of landlords/ owners: who were mainly females (widows, or freed slaves)

<sup>52</sup> K. Cuno, Joint family households and rural notables in 19<sup>th</sup>-century Egypt. *International Journal of Middle East Studies*. Vol.27, n 4. (1995) Pp.485-502. p486

<sup>53</sup> Cuno, *ibid.*

<sup>54</sup> archival records

<sup>55</sup> Naguib Mahfouz, described his family's move from *al-Gammaliyyah* to *al-Abbasiyyah*, the new district of the city, as early as the 1930s.

<sup>56</sup> Rumi-style windows are timber windows developed during Muhammad Ali's era to simulate European windows that are relatively tall and divided into three vertical parts.

<sup>57</sup> Naguib Mahfouz is a Nobel Prize Winner in Literature. In his Trilogy Novels, which were set in nearby *al-Darb al-Asfar*, 'he used the streets and alleys of historic Cairo at the turn of the century as the backdrop of his socialist-realist novels', that appeared as documentation of the social history of old Cairo at that time. See Williams, *Reconstructing Islamic Cairo*. p274

<sup>58</sup> This novel, was first published in 1956, and describes life in the context of *al-Darb al-Asfar* from 1910-1920, where Mahfouz lived out his childhood. Therefore his novels about old Cairo are considered as documentation of real life of the time, especially in *Gammaliyyah* where *al-Darb al-Asfar* lies.

<sup>59</sup> Mahfouz, *Palace Walk*. p1

<sup>60</sup> Mahfouz, *Khabaya al-Qahira* (Mysteries of Cairo).